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Tuesday
DECEMBER 22, 2015

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MERRY MOVIEGOERS

**'TIS THE SEASON TO WATCH MOVIES. HERE ARE ONES
WORTH SEEING (OR SKIPPING) ON CHRISTMAS DAY 8-9, 11**

LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE ILLUSTRATION

60 years of tracking Santa **3**

Bulls' Christmas Day game plan **6**

Get cozy at Bar Marta **12**



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Santa Claus rings a bell as he sits on a camel in front of Jerusalem's Old City's skyline as people around the world prepare to celebrate Christmas. GETTY IMAGES

big picture



SANTA TRACKING 101

NORAD CONTINUES 60-YEAR TRADITION OF FOLLOWING SANTA'S MOVEMENTS

By Rianne Coale | REDEYE

For many, the first time they ever hear about NORAD is this time of year, when the military organization grabs the spotlight and awakens the child in us all with updates—passed along via social media or the local TV weatherman—about Santa's travels starting Christmas Eve.

Seriously, it's a joint Canadian-U.S. military group based in Colorado. Tracking Santa.

The North American Aerospace Defense Command's (NORAD) full-time job is keeping eyes on the skies, monitoring aerospace for any threatening or active aircraft, spacecraft or missiles. But during December, it takes on the job of tracking Santa's yuletide journey.

That's a big job, considering there are more than 7.2 billion people in the world, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. But Santa isn't going to visit ALL those people because, you

know, the naughty list and all.

Santa tracking started in 1955 by mistake. A Colorado Springs-based company ran an advertisement directing children to call Santa directly ... but the number was misprinted. Instead of calling Santa, the phone ran through to the Continental Air Defense Command Operations Center. The director of operations at the time had his staff check the radar for indications of Santa making his way south from the North Pole. So children who called were given updates on his location,

and thus a tradition was born, according to the NORAD Tracks Santa website.

In 1958, the Continental Air Defense's successor—NORAD—was created, and it continued the Santa-tracking tradition.

Sixty years later, the Santa tracker remains popular. On Twitter, [@NoradSanta](#) has some 151,000 followers. Last year, the NORAD Tracks Santa website reached 21.8 million visits for December from people in 234 different countries and territories. Their team of more than 1,500 employees answered more than 134,000 phone calls and 6,500 emails in 23 hours.

NORAD starts tracking Santa on Dec. 24. Staffers look at their radars, following him from the North Pole with the aid of infrared from Rudolph's nose. Thanks to the Santa Cams that were installed in 1997, NORAD is able to snap pictures of Santa on his journey.

OK, so there are photos to prove it. But are we REALLY to believe he can deliver all those

presents in a single night? Lt. Marco Chouinard, NORAD spokesman, says Santa takes advantage of the time zones and his super-fast sleigh—which, in case you didn't know, is faster than the speed of effing starlight.

"Santa does not experience time the way we do. He functions within his own space-time continuum," Chouinard said. "For us it may seem like 24 hours, but for him, it could be a few days, a week or even a month he spends delivering presents to children all over the world."

Getting the scoop on Santa's route is tough; only he knows it and adjusts it depending on the weather.

So what does NORAD have to say to the non-believers?

"We've been working with Santa for 60 years, and we've seen that he's very much alive and well in the hearts of kids and adults alike," Chouinard said.

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Exactly which holidays are on the CTA's Holiday Train?



TRANSIT DIARIES

Rianne Coale

» rcoale@redeye
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I never really looked that closely at the CTA's Holiday Train, beyond its bright lights and festive decorations. But upon closer inspection, I noticed that among the elves, Christmas trees, candy canes and more, there was a lighted sign on one of the train cars that read "Peace on Earth"—a nod to the

biblical passage in which angels tell a group of shepherds about the birth of Jesus Christ.

So Christmas—as in the birth of Christ—is represented, it seems.

But that made me wonder: What other holidays are represented on the Holiday Train? So I called the CTA and asked.

A spokesman for the transit agency emailed me and noted that the train is intended to celebrate the general winter holiday season and that it's "non-denominational."

Honestly, I don't think anyone is *really* offended by the train's Christmas undertones. But, you never know.

I feel like this time of year all you hear about is a lot of controversy over the separation of Christ from "Christmas" and the general political correctness of using the word "holiday." While you frequently find Christmas decorations all over something sporting the word "holiday," what about Kwanzaa or Hanukkah? Those two holidays are, after all, celebrated this time of year, too. Oh, hey, and there's Festivus, too. If you're using "holiday" as a way to be inclusive, then what about actually including all the holidays?

The CTA Holiday Train has been around for 23 years, and there's no denying that it's a seasonal Chicago tradition that many people

love and look forward to, including myself. But I think it could be really cool to decorate each car to represent a different religious or cultural holiday being celebrated this time of year. Riders would get a chance to learn about or experience a holiday they wouldn't otherwise be exposed to on their train ride through the city. I think that could really capture the inclusivity of "holiday" at its heart.

I know we're closing out this year, and there's only limited time left to catch the train, but maybe this is something to think about for next year. Your last chance to ride the holiday train this year is Wednesday on the Yellow Line.

And it's never too soon to begin planning.

Because starting in early September, CTA employees working at the CTA's Skokie shop volunteer to decorate the holiday train.

Other fun facts about the train:

» **Recycling:** The same decorations are used year after year, according to the CTA.

» **Price tag:** This year, the costs for operating both the holiday train and bus were covered as part of a \$300,000 first-

ever sponsorship arrangement with Sprint.

» **History:** It began in 1992 along the Blue Line when a "Season's Greetings from the CTA" sign was placed on the front of an out-of-service train that was used to deliver food to various charities. In 1995, a flatcar with Santa and reindeer, more lights and a sign that read "Season's Greetings from the Blue Line" were added. The train was first used for scheduled customer service in 1996, and as it gained popularity, it expanded to include service on all CTA rail lines throughout the holiday season, according to the CTA.

IF YOU HAVE A STORY YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE FOR "THE TRANSIT DIARIES," WHICH APPEARS EVERY WEEK ONLINE AND IN REDEYE ON PAGE 4, EMAIL US AT REDEYE@REDEYECICAGO.COM WITH "TRANSIT DIARIES" IN THE SUBJECT LINE.



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sports

Santa checks his phone before the Bulls' game against the L.A. Lakers at the United Center last Christmas.
ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/TRIBUNE FILE



THE MOST (LY) WONDERFUL TIME

BULLS HAVE LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRISTMAS DAY GAMES

By Paul M. Banks | FOR REDEYE

Bulls players have a bit of a love-hate relationship with playing on Christmas.

On one hand, it's an honor to be one of the NBA teams selected to play on Dec. 25, as the whole nation is watching. On the other, it also means you must spend the day working instead of with loved ones.

"It's a sweet and sour situation because yes, we do play on Christmas and a lot of people watch," Pau Gasol said. "It's always a special game and a special day, and it's nice to be able to be on national television, but you don't get to be at home with your family and celebrate with them."

Last year, the Bulls hosted the L.A. Lakers on Christmas Day. This year they'll travel to Oklahoma City on Dec. 24 to take on the Thunder the next day.

The NBA leans toward teams with strong brand appeal and/or star power for the ABC/ESPN Christmas Day games, so the Bulls are likely to keep getting scheduled on that date in future years.

Unless they go into a prolonged slump, that is; the Bulls played no games on that date between 1999 and 2009 (though a lockout precluded Christmas Day contests in 1998).

As for Joakim Noah, he definitely does not have mixed feelings about playing on Christmas.

"I hate it. Yeah, I hate it," he said. "I hate having to go to Oklahoma; I'd rather hang out with my family."

Teammate Taj Gibson feels the opposite. "I've been playing on Christmas Day a long

THE DIGIT

12-7

The Bulls are 12-7 all time in Christmas Day games, including 3-2 in their past five.

time, so it's a great feeling knowing that everybody around the world is watching, keying in. It's real fun," he said. "Guys get up for it. ... It feels like a playoff game."

Many players and their families find a way to embrace holiday traditions even if there's a game that

day.

"I'm excited about my family being able to come down and share some family time," second-year forward Doug McDermott said. "I think we'll do it the night before the game, probably in the hotel room. I don't think my dad can make it because they have games, but my mom, my brother are going to come down and we're going to have a good time."

McDermott's father, Greg, is the men's basketball coach at Creighton, where Doug played and won several national player of the

year awards his senior year.

"I remember being a little kid on Christmas Day, opening presents and then watching NBA games, so I think it's a pretty sweet feeling [to be playing that day]," he said.

Aaron Brooks said participating in the holiday showcase brings an added perk.

"Of course, the new uniforms, to add to the collection," he said.

Noah, however, was unmoved when asked if he cares about the yuletide uniforms: "Not at all."

Like McDermott and his family, one way or another the Bulls will find a way to spend time with those who matter most to them.

"We'll just celebrate it after," Brooks said. "It's not the particular day but being around family that's important."

PAUL M. BANKS IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR.
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HUMBUG!

The cast of The Second City's "Twist Your Dickens" has taken over today's Five on Five panel—without breaking character. The show runs through Jan. 2 at the Goodman Theatre.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LIZ LAUREN



Scrooge



Marley
Peter Gwinn



Bob
Cratchit
Tim Shiffen



Ghost of
Christmas
Past
Travis Turner



Ghost of
Christmas
Present
Beth Melowski

1	What beats dislocating your knee and calmly popping it back into place mid-game?	Pile driving a homeless guy who's begging for change.	Tying your decomposed jaw back onto your head so you can continue haunting.	A smile on the face of your angelic, perpetually sickly son.	When the '88 Jamaican bobsled team carried their broken sled across the finish line in "Cool Runnings."	Drinking the post-game Gatorade mixed with Everclear to make sure it doesn't hhhhhurt.
2	Who will be the next person Cam Newton angers with his end-zone celebration?	Me. Being Scrooge, I'm naturally a Bears fan. I like to see hope disappear from people's faces every December.	The ghost of ACL tears past.	My boss seems to be pissed off by pretty much everything.	Debbie Allen as Lydia Grant the dance teacher in "Fame."	BEYONCE. CAM, YOU AIN'T GOT THOSE MOVES.
3	Going from No. 1 draft pick to playing in the D-League is like going from a bangin' party with the Ghost of Christmas Past to a fiery grave with the Ghost of Christmas Future.	... going from the richest businessman in London to a chain-wearing ghost whose jaw is attached with a string.	... being told to come in 30 minutes early on CHRISTMAS FREAKIN' MORNING.	... "House Party" vs. "House Party 2."	... going from partying at John Barleycorn to your parents' basement.
4	Fill in the blank: After the Bears' loss, Shea McClellin said, "We just need to get our ____ in a better place."	Kicker.	Retirement packages.	Renewed sense of goodwill among men.	Cross Colours jeans.	Jockstraps (tee hee).
5	How should the Blackhawks' Marcus Kruger pass four months recovering from wrist surgery?	Learning a new sport. Bah, humbug!	Atoning for his misdeeds.	NOT clerking for my toolbag boss. We're talking carpal tunnel for days.	Being the first link in the human chain for Hands Across America.	Vodka of the month club + all seasons of "Beverly Hills, 90210" = HEAVEN.

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movies

FA-LA-LA-LA-LA-LA-LA-FILMS

By Matt Pais | REDEYE

There's good news and bad news: The good news is that you love this time of year, with holid- days and a lot of food and days off of work and Oscar-candidate movies. The bad news is that of the big, award-contending offerings opening Friday, only one is actually worth seeing. What- ever you see/do, have a great week and rest of the holiday season. And also see "The Big Short."

MPAIS@REDEVECHICAGO.COM | @MATTPAIS

TOP 15 GROSSING MOVIES TO OPEN ON CHRISTMAS DAY

SHERLOCK HOLMES (2009) \$24,608,941

LES MISERABLES (2012) \$18,111,665

UNBROKEN (2014) \$15,434,400

INTO THE WOODS (2014) \$15,089,740

DJANGO UNCHAINED (2012) \$15,011,121

MARLEY AND ME (2008) \$14,380,980

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON (2008) \$11,871,831

BEDTIME STORIES (2008) \$10,578,817

ALI (2001) \$10,216,625

CATCH ME IF YOU CAN (2002) \$9,882,063

ALIENS VS. PREDATOR REQUIEM (2007) \$9,515,615

THE WOLF OF WALL STREET (2013) \$9,150,379

DREAMGIRLS (2006) \$8,726,095

VALKYRIE (2008) \$8,493,972

PATCH ADAMS (1998) \$8,081,760

Jump to Page 11 for "The Hateful Eight" review

SOURCE: BOXOFFICEMOJO.COM



CAROL R

Rooney Mara and Cate Blanchett in 'Carol'



JOY PG-13

Jennifer Lawrence in 'Joy'

Rooney Mara is incredible in 'Carol'

Ugh, awards season is so dumb. Apparently "Carol" star Rooney Mara is incredible in "Carol" and can't believe the ease she feels with this novel "The Price of Salt" and watching as Therese (pronounced "tur-eh") meets Carol

Jennifer Lawrence cannot save 'Joy'

That Jennifer Lawrence is some kind of charisma-based human miracle has been well-established, the actress arriving what invented a special dog collar years ago that she never patented and thus lost ownership of, but urgency makes her go along with the



FAST PAISED

Matt Pairs

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Mara, who shared the Best Actress prize at Cannes, is being campaigned in the Oscars' Best Supporting Actress category while her co-star Cate Blanchett, who has the supporting part in the film, gets the Best Actress campaign because she's ridiculous.

Mara's exceptional, owning the movie in a way that's gentle but never weak. She does things that are almost imperceptible, like how Therese (Mara) looks kindly dismissive when her admirer Richard (Jake Lacy), who calls her "Terri" and is too oblivious to see how little that suits her, tells her he loves her as she drives off with Carol (Blanchett). Later, Mara displays fondness and disinterest, so naturally you can swear you know exactly what the character's thinking without her actually saying anything.

Blanchett's very good too, but "Carol" peaks when Mara expresses so much so cannily. In many ways the story's a little obvious, based on Patricia Highsmith's

near-stranger. In some ways it's like a milder, 1950s-set "Blue is the Warmest Color," with a comfortable bond developing in a world that's not OK with it. More specifically, Carol's husband, Harge (Kyle Chandler), disputes the previously agreed-upon terms of their custody discussion about their daughter on grounds of a "morality clause."

Director Todd Haynes went deeper and farther with 2002's acclaimed "Far From Heaven," another melodrama inspired by prolific '50s director Douglas Sirk. "Carol" is steady and frequently lovely—and has some excellent scenes, including the meeting of Therese and Carol that moves ever so slightly from friendly to softly suggestive—but notable more for its compositions and performances than its story or interpersonal dynamics. As great as Mara is, Therese isn't a great character; her naïveté and resulting arc feel uncertain, and the portrait of intolerance by now feels a bit familiar. Compared to the rich depiction of the era in "Brooklyn," "Carol" is the less memorable of the Oscar contenders.

It's just an authentically old-fashioned document about the intangibles that make people yearn to be together and the challenge to get the thing that you want at the time that you want it.

At last! We finally get the biopic about the pathologist who in the early 2000s identified and named chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), the concussion-caused affliction frequently found in professional football players (and players of other sports, too, including hockey) that leads to a variety of potentially fatal problems. Did you know that Dr. Bennet Omalu (Will Smith) married Prema Mutiso (Gugu Mbatha-Raw), a Kenyan nurse who stayed with him in Pittsburgh and apparently said clunky things like, "I can't tell what you're afraid of: what you'll find or what you won't"? Or that he didn't like to dance, but when they went to a club together he discovered that he loves dancing? All this and more can be seen in "Omalu."

No. No no no. The movie is "Concussion." Yes, that should include Omalu's discovery, and it's notable that it seemed to have taken an outsider (specifically, a native of Nigeria with no interest in or fondness for football) to take action on a problem the NFL allegedly knew about for a long time. But the big story here is the cover-up—what happened behind closed doors, with perspectives from people in charge and from the players, particularly as more information started coming to light as former

now feels like a long time ago to take Hollywood in her hands, say something ridiculously spontaneous and charming and then be insanely talented on screen to the point at which backlash is nonsense.

And, yes, the Oscar-winner ("Silver Linings Playbook") absolutely rules—no reason to be classier than that in the language, you know she'd think that was OK—in "Joy." Frustration, release, determination, horror, elation; she's so natural, always commanding without overdoing it. She's so good it's almost enough to trick you into thinking that her third collaboration with writer-director David O. Russell ("American Hustle") has much to it other than poorly told persistence in a vacuum.

It's the American Dream as a nuance-free heroine steamroller; judging and holding accountable practically everyone else who gets developed as a character.

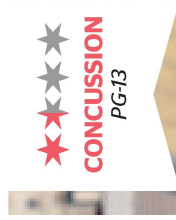
Feeling trapped in a cartoonish hell of family nonsense in which her ex-husband (Edgar Ramirez) lives in the basement and mom (Virginia Madsen) never leaves her room or her soap operas, struggling mother-of-two Joy finds new inspiration when she devises a washing machine-friendly mop that wrings itself out. You'd think she'd be extra careful with decision-making having

questionable conditions of her dad (Robert De Niro) and his new girlfriend (Isabella Rossellini), a widow with funds to finance the product. Her resentful half-sister Peggy (Elisabeth Rohm) hangs around, inevitably there to screw something up.

"Joy" is inspired by a true story but doesn't feel rich with the detail of real life. It's simultaneously cynical and hopeful, rarely bridging the gap and detached from the relationships at hand. Relevant issues of loyalty go totally unexplored despite superfluous voiceover from Joy's grandmother. Russell ("The Fighter," "Flirting with Disaster") has done good things with family dynamics, but here he's removed from these people, seeing them narrowly in separate boxes. Joy hardly ever interacts with her best friend (Dascha Polanco), and for a while one of her kids seems to disappear. It's great that she establishes early on that she's not someone who needs a man, and there's no love interest at all (even with Bradley Cooper in a small role as a QVC exec). But outside of financial risk, there's no sense of the sacrifice that comes with entrepreneurship, only Joy's sacrifice when not pursuing goals. Is it too late to turn this into a very special episode of "Shark Tank"?

—M.P.

You're telling the wrong story, 'Concussion'



Will Smith in 'Concussion'

be foolish enough to cut between hard-hitting game footage, shots of medical journals, stylized depictions of brains and Omalu's concerned face as dramatic music plays? Think again.

Stories of former athletes' dangerous and debilitating conditions obviously are stunning, as is the notion that science may progressively show that a beloved sport (which I love watching too) is so risky as to become irresponsible. That the NFL would value the game over the

people who play it is unconscionable. Smith is good. But how are players reacting to these studies and events? Outside some rule changes, how has all this changed the game in America, or has it? This story deserves a movie that allows for complex ideas, not just a blanket of corruption and a definitive statement of danger. If there's one thing you can't live without in football, it's guts.

—M.P.



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★★★★★
THE HATEFUL
EIGHT
R



Walton Goggins in 'The Hateful Eight'

OK, time to move on, Quentin

FAST PAISED

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When was the last time a character's face suffered such varied punishment? In "The Hateful Eight," an elbow, a bowl of stew, a mouthful of blood and a head full of brain matter splatter right between Daisy Domergue's (Jennifer Jason Leigh) eyes and anywhere else they can splatter. In a movie full of aggression, she arguably gets it the worst.

In other words, we now return to the violent world of writer-director Quentin Tarantino, who's such a talented writer of dialogue and character that it's no wonder he loves the sound of his own voice, but not that it excuses the perpetually growing sense that he feels editing is for chumps and you will sit there because there's more to say, dammit. "The Hateful Eight," which moves a few years past "Django Unchained" to a post-Civil War Wyoming, clocks in at about

three hours; if you think that's because it's jam-packed with story and couldn't possibly lose a second, I disagree.

Bounty hunter John "The Hangman" Ruth (Kurt Russell), so nicknamed because he always delivers people to the hangman rather than just killing them himself, stops on his way to deliver Daisy and picks up Marquis Warren (Samuel L. Jackson), a formerly decorated major now working as a bounty hunter with opposite feelings about targets' survival. Blizzard conditions make travel beautiful and dangerous; they're lucky to make it to Minnie's Haberdashery, a fireplace- and lousy-coffee-offering oasis where they encounter a variety of mysterious men (including Demian Bichir, Tim Roth and Bruce Dern) and rarely go long without the sense that someone could die very soon.

That Tarantino's arguably aiming lower here than he did with his previous two 2.5-star movies (the likewise overlong "Django Unchained" and slightly more successful "Inglourious Basterds") is both blessing and

curse. He seems more in control because he's scaled back to aim for some points about race in America ("When n—ers are scared, that's when white folks are safe," says racist sheriff-to-be Chris Mannix [Walton Goggins], who also hitches a ride in the carriage) but mostly just weaves a simple yarn that indulges his love of language. "Keeping you at a disadvantage is an advantage I intend to keep," John notes early on. Tarantino's words really sing, and giggle-worthy performances sparked from perfect casting help.

But I'm more likely to do impressions of pretty much every character than to recommend this meandering tale of frontier justice, whose deceptions are neither shocking nor meaningful and whose stylized violence drifts into gratuitous brutality. With the state of the nation being what it is, is it not worth someone as gifted as Tarantino (whose "Kill Bill" efforts were the last time he nailed it) to either make a statement about all this violence or question why he's one of the few filmmakers still unleashing it with such glee?

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The Martinez
with gin and
vermouth

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Cozy confines

**HUMBOLDT PARK NEWBIE BAR MARTA
IS A PERFECT WINTER HIDEAWAY**



Chicken liver toast

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

“We’re not making things float.”

That might seem like an obvious statement coming from a restaurant with “bar” in its name, but Jeff Pikus, executive chef of the new Bar Marta in Humboldt Park, isn’t exactly a pedestrian cook. Pikus was once the chef de cuisine at Alinea. When he left the acclaimed Lincoln Park restaurant, he traveled around Vietnam for a few months, a time he calls “incredible and a great opportunity to eat and think and not have to worry whether my line cook was going to come in late.”

Shortly thereafter, he joined Brendan Sodikoff’s restaurant group Hogsalt, where he was instrumental in launching the culinary side of Maude’s Liquor Bar, Bavette’s and High Five Ramen, among others. He may not be floating stuff at Bar Marta, but the last time I ate at Bavette’s, I floated out with happiness. I was hoping for more of the same when I checked out Bar Marta.

The scene

The owner of Bar Marta, Austin Baker, is a veteran of one of the best high-end seafood restaurants in the world—Le Bernardin in New York City—and helped the Hogsalt team open Au Cheval. As such, it’s no surprise that there are some Hogsalt-like touches at Bar Marta: neat old-timey hand-lettered hours near the entrance, a hushed candle-lit vibe and a cocoon of a dining room where the windows have been blocked off by lush heavy draperies so that your focus is not on the street corner, but on the people and things happening within the room.

“Yeah, that’s a thing we took from Hogsalt,” Pikus said. “We even built a wall on the Chicago street side so that the diners’ focus is on the room, not what’s out the window.”

Though the place is clearly focused on being casual, it has some elegant touches, including a towering back bar and a sweeping white marble bar top that Pikus said was painted brown to look like wood by the

previous owner, something the Bar Marta crew only discovered after a little judicious sanding. The walls are sparsely decorated with a large map of France and a few small framed photos of seeds and plants. The place feels a touch like a speakeasy.

The drinks

Complementing that vibe is a pre-Prohibition, era-rich cocktail list filled with old-school gems such as the sazerac, a double old fashioned and the Martinez (\$10 each) curated by Au Cheval vet Christina Carrera. I loved the Martinez, a 50-50 split of vermouth and gin often thought to be a precursor to the martini. It drank like a juniper-spiked manhattan and finished with a hint of orange peel and mulled wine spices. The wine list, curated by Jerusha Frost, is deep and full of food-friendly gems such as the stony high-acid Gruner Veltliner and the Pinot Gris from Left Foot Charley of Traverse City, Mich.

My favorite part of the list, however, is a handful of “orange” wines, partially oxidized white wines that ferment with their skins (which are often removed during the white wine-making process) and thus possess an orange hue. The 2008 La Stoppa Malvasia di Candia Ageno (\$17) offered by the glass was a mind-blowing pour full of honey and orange notes complemented by a touch of shellac and barnyard funk (both good things).

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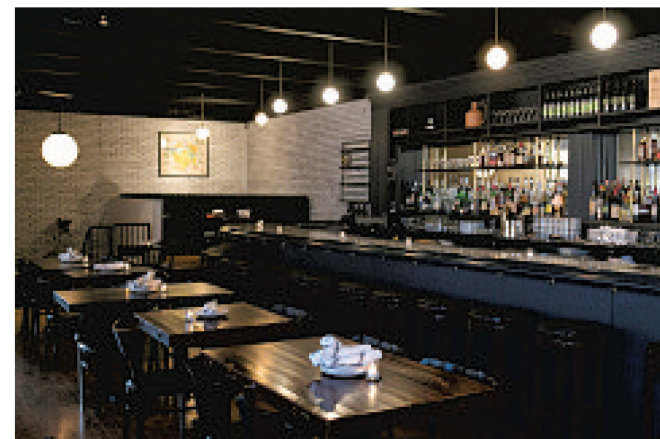
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Iceberg and grains



Cacio e pepe with truffles



The food

That funk complemented a handful of silky triangle-shaped ravioli stuffed with mascarpone, chives and king crab glistening in an uni butter sauce (\$19). As glorious as that pasta was, it was bested by the cacio e pepe (\$12), a tangle of housemade spaghetti dripping with pecorino cheese and black pepper. I opted for a 5-gram shaving of burgundy truffle full of earthy perfume (\$10). I doubt there's a better version served in Rome.

Housemade sourdough was grilled and slathered with tufts of velvety chicken liver puree that wafted cognac and sherry vapors (\$12). Bracing wintergreen notes from parsley sprigs, the fire of Calabrian chili and smoky bits of bacon filled each bite.

Though Pikus is certainly serving many refined versions of classic homey dishes, he's also pushing the envelope at Bar Marta. There's a dish called iceberg and grains (\$10), and though it sounds like the biography of a farmer who died on the Titanic, it's actually an inspired salad. It's kind of like what I imagine a steakhouse-style wedge salad would be if it were hippified and reimagined by Alice Waters of Chez Panisse. A crisp side of iceberg lettuce drips with tangy avocado dressing fortified with butter-milk, sour cream and garlic powder. Instead of croutons, there's a smattering of sprouted lentils and farro. "When you're at a bigger spot, there's pressure to make things accessible," Pikus said. "At Hogsalt, it was always, 'Let's add more butter, more cream.' But here



Banana rum cake

MINI-REVIEW
Bar Marta
2700 W. Chicago
Ave. 773-697-4489

★★★★★
Off to a good start

we're creating something that's maybe a little healthy."

The only thing I had issue with was a fillet of salmon (\$20), which had been grilled just a touch past well-done. Bits of the crust were dry and chewy, and the interior, while not overcooked, wasn't as flaky or medium-rare as I prefer. Still, that fillet swam in a chunky, glorious salsa-like romesco sauce spiked with Marcona almonds, red peppers, tomatoes, olive oil and smoked paprika that I spooned straight into my gullet long after the fish was gone.

Dessert

As it turns out, Pikus is also a damn good pastry chef. A banana cake (\$8) was moist and soaked in more rum than Ernest Hemingway on a good afternoon in Cuba. The dessert, inspired by a dark and stormy cocktail, was topped with candied lime-spiked ginger and wispy curls of dehydrated banana and served with a side of Ben and Jerry's finest vanilla ice cream. "We wanted to make our own ice cream, but there's not enough space," Pikus said. "We love Black Dog Gelato, but [they're] pretty busy right now, so we talked

about it and decided when you go to the bodega or grocery store and buy ice cream, you're almost always coming home with Ben & Jerry's, so that's what we use."

The service

I asked Pikus why he and Baker, two fine-dining exiles, were so committed to doing a casual restaurant. "People take themselves so seriously in that world," he said. "We just didn't want to be part of that. We want a place where the staff can have fun, drink a beer and laugh. Creating a good environment for people to work is just as important as creating good food." While I agree with that sentiment, you have to be careful that being laid-back doesn't turn into a lack of discipline while serving guests.

The dining room isn't very big, but it felt understaffed. Water wasn't refilled promptly, and though we shared six courses, extra plates and silverware were never swapped out. Many of the fixtures were inherited from the previous restaurant, including the utilitarian wooden chairs, which were a bit uncomfortable and wobbly.

Bottom line

In a part of town that's more notable for its drinking spots such as the California Clipper and Haywood Tavern, Bar Marta is a fine new neighborhood restaurant (and bar) that happens to serve fare worth seeking out.

MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR. REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED, AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE. REDEYE@REDEYEECHICAGO.COM | @REDEYEEATDRINK

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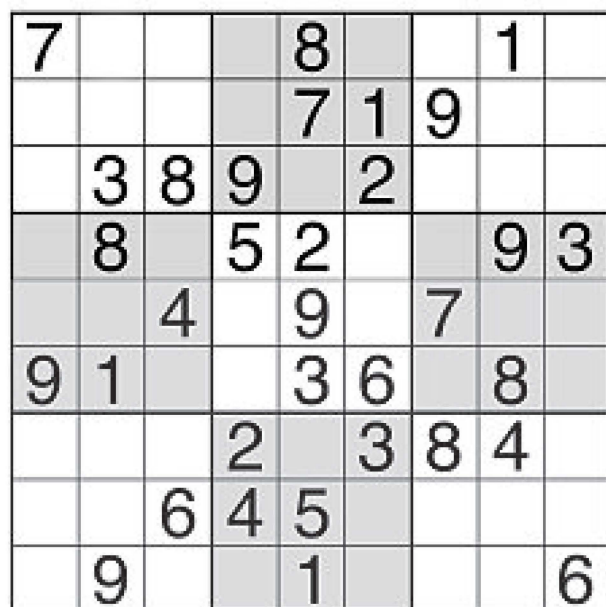
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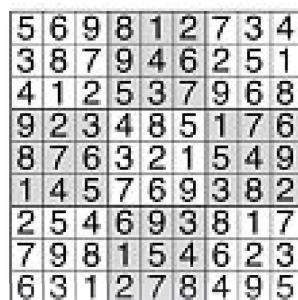
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MONDAY'S SOLUTIONS

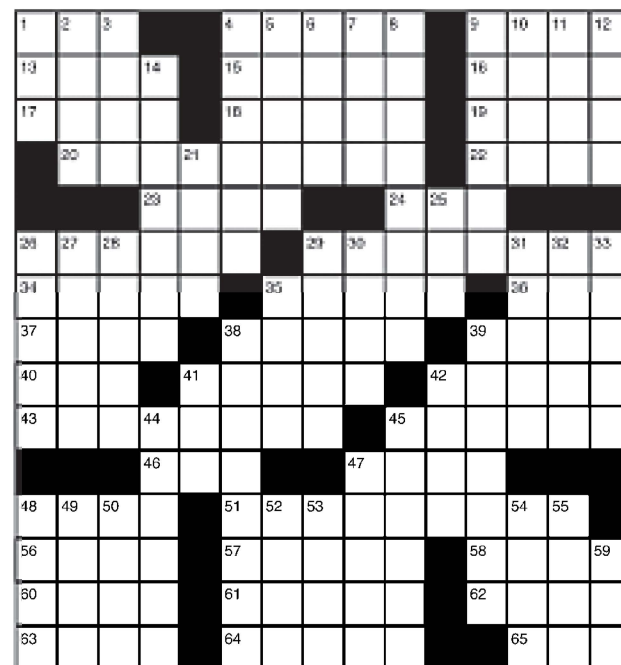


ACROSS

- 1 For __ a jolly good fellow.
- 4 Swedish dollar
- 9 Q-tip, for one
- 13 Fumbler's word
- 15 Chase
- 16 __ of Good Hope
- 17 Small fly
- 18 Game site
- 19 Nights before holidays
- 20 Laughed to oneself
- 22 Homer's home
- 23 Equitable; just
- 24 Inventor __ Whitney
- 26 Art projects
- 29 Late singer Eliot, familiarly
- 34 Wolves' cries
- 35 Ms. Hilton
- 36 Allow
- 37 Out of town
- 38 Term __ red pottery clay
- 39 Go out with
- 40 WWII president
- 41 Gathers leaves
- 42 Watery part of the blood
- 43 Item in a makeup kit
- 45 49¢ items
- 46 Ms. Thurman
- 47 Dull sound
- 48 German city
- 51 Untruthful
- 55 Very excited
- 57 __ tube; pool toy
- 58 Ark builder
- 60 __ on lake test
- 61 Blazing
- 62 Valley
- 63 Chattering birds
- 64 Jobs down
- 65 __ person; a piece

DOWN

- 1 Greedy one
- 2 Geologic ages
- 3 Reach across
- 4 Yellowish brown GI pants
- 5 More uncommon
- 6 Above
- 7 Nary a one



- 8 The world of education
- 9 Like beautiful views
- 10 Surfboard support
- 11 Primates
- 12 Most ideal
- 14 Rigidly
- 21 Long-running Broadway hit
- 25 Spanish article
- 26 Rub enough to make sore
- 27 Boisterous
- 28 In the know
- 29 Alma __; one's old school
- 30 Garfunkel's namesakes
- 31 Nightstand awakener
- 32 Arrange
- 33 Flower stalks
- 35 Jab
- 38 Prime Minister Stephen Harper, for one
- 39 Street with no second outlet
- 41 Curved edge
- 42 Stupefy
- 44 Dives forward
- 45 Seacoasts
- 47 In that place
- 48 Tub activity
- 49 Villain
- 50 Part of speech
- 52 News, for short
- 53 In a __ miffed
- 54 Detergent
- 55 Story
- 59 That girl



BRAIN CANDY

- » Sideburns were named after Union Army General Ambrose Burnside.
- » Michel Lobito ate an entire airplane over the course of two years.
- » Gail Halvorsen, known as "The Candy Bomber," dropped candy to children in West Berlin in 1948-49.
- » Touching another man's beard was offensive enough to warrant a duel in the Middle Ages.

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That's about how much "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" made worldwide in its opening weekend, according to variety.com. That's the biggest global opening in history, beating "Jurassic World's" \$524.9 million. Analysts are saying that the movie could make close to \$2 billion, Variety reported.

THE DIGIT

NEWS



Well, he's not Adele...

Justin Bieber's latest musical effort, "Purpose," has officially topped the 1 million sold mark, becoming his fifth album to pass that milestone in the U.S., according to billboard.com. It took five weeks for the album to hit that mark. Meanwhile, Adele's "25" is nearing 6 million. Soooo, whatever, congrats to Bieber. **AP PHOTO**

The quote

"Some artists, the bigger they get, the more horrible they get, and the more unlikable. ... I don't care if you make an amazing album—if I don't like you, I ain't getting your record. I don't want you being played in my house if I think you're a bastard."

— Adele, to *Time*, about her high standards for selecting musicians to support.
Girl, we hear you.

Noma Dumezweni
GETTY IMAGES FILE

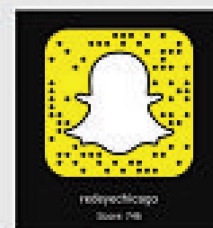


J.K. Rowling doesn't like it, SHE LOVES IT

Noma Dumezweni has been cast as Hermione in the upcoming production of "Harry Potter and the Cursed Child," and J.K. Rowling loves it. In response to how she felt about the choice of a black actress to play Hermione, who was played by a white actress in the films, Rowling tweeted, "Canon: brown eyes, frizzy hair and very clever. White skin was never specified. Rowling loves black Hermione." Rowling wasn't the only "Harry Potter" family member to respond. Matthew Lewis, who played Neville Longbottom in the films, tweeted, "And Neville Longbottom was blonde. I really don't care. Good luck to [Dumezweni.] We love the 'Harry Potter' family."



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